

**STATEMENT OF DONALD W. MURPHY, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING S. 1721 A BILL TO AMEND THE OMNIBUS PARKS AND PUBLIC LANDS MANAGEMENT ACT OF 1996 TO EXTEND THE AUTHORIZATION FOR CERTAIN NATIONAL HERITAGE AREAS, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.**

**June 22, 2006**

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Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before your committee to present the views of the Department of the Interior on S. 1721, the National Heritage Area Extension Act of 2005.

The bill has four titles. **Title I** would extend the authority for nine national heritage areas to receive federal funds for an additional 15 years. It would increase the authorization ceiling from \$10 million to \$20 million per area, and would make several amendments to the authorizing legislation for three of these areas. **Title II** would reauthorize the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail, eliminate the \$4,000,000 appropriations ceiling, and require that the Secretary undertake a strategic plan to increase opportunities for participation by the public in the trail route. **Title III** would reauthorize the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission for an additional 20 years, update the management plan, provide for additional commission members to be appointed, authorize an additional \$10 million for the commission, and authorize \$10 million in development funds to the heritage corridor. **Title IV** would designate the Mississippi River National Heritage Area across 10 states.

Based on the complexity and varied nature of each of these titles, the Department would like to present our position on each title separately.

**Title I-Extensions and Technical Corrections to Omnibus Parks and Public Lands Management Act of 1996**

Title I would extend the authorization for nine national heritage areas, authorized in the Omnibus Parks and Public Lands Management Act of 1996, from September 30, 2012 to September 30, 2027, and would increase their current appropriations ceiling of \$10 million to \$20 million. It also would make several minor amendments to the authorizing legislation for the National Coal Heritage Area, the South Carolina Heritage Area, and the Ohio & Erie National Heritage Corridor. Although the Department supports the proposed minor amendments to the three heritage areas, we do not support reauthorizing federal assistance to all nine heritage areas for an additional 15 years or increasing their authorization ceilings.

A recent National Park System Advisory Board report *Charting a Future for National Heritage Areas* recognized the important role of national heritage areas in expanding

conservation stewardship and in identifying and preserving significant historic resources. The report also recognized that national heritage areas need a legislative foundation that frames and supports this approach. The national heritage area program legislation (S. 243) that passed the Senate last year and is supported by the Department would provide such a framework.

The program legislation authorizes the Secretary to provide financial assistance to national heritage areas for a period not to exceed 15 years after an area is designated by Congress. Local coordinating entities that prepare and implement the management plan for the national heritage area could receive up to \$1 million per year, not to exceed \$10 million over the 15-year period. Prior to the end of the 15-year period, an evaluation and report would be required on the accomplishments, sustainability, and recommendations for the future of each national heritage area. Extending the federal financial commitment to the heritage areas in S. 1721 is not in keeping with this framework. Therefore, the Department does not support section 101(a) of S. 1721.

## **Title II-Reauthorization of Appropriations for New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail Route**

Title II would reauthorize the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail Route, eliminate the \$4,000,000 appropriations ceiling, and require the completion of a strategic plan by the Secretary. The Department supports Title II of S. 1721 with three amendments.

In 1988, the Secretary was authorized to designate a vehicular tour route in coastal New Jersey and to prepare an inventory of sites along the route. An interpretive program was also mandated to provide for public appreciation, education, understanding and enjoyment of important fish and wildlife habitats, geologic and geographical landforms, cultural resources, and migration routes in coastal New Jersey. The Secretary was authorized to provide technical assistance, prepare and distribute information, and erect signs along the route. The trail links national wildlife refuges, national parklands, National Historic Landmarks, and National Register sites with important historic communities, state parks, natural areas, and other resources to tell the story of New Jersey's role in shaping U.S. history and in providing internationally important habitats for bird and other migrations.

The trail, an affiliated area of the National Park System, is a partnership among the National Park Service; the State of New Jersey through its Department of Environmental Protection, Commerce and Economic Growth Commission, and Pinelands Commission; and many local government and private non-profit partners. Through interpretation of five themes (Maritime History, Coastal Habitats, Wildlife Migration, Relaxation & Inspiration, and Historic Settlements), the trail brings attention to important natural and cultural resources along coastal New Jersey. The trail demonstrates the potential of public/private partnerships that allow the National Park Service to meet its core mission of natural and cultural resource preservation along with interpretation and public education in a cost-efficient manner through technical assistance while reducing operational responsibilities.

Reauthorization of the trail would enable the National Park Service to complete implementation of the trail plan, as supported by the public and our partners. Without additional time and funding, the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail Route will be left incomplete. Implementation of the plan is also critical in building a base of sustainable partners and developing a strategy for the long-term management of the trail. Additionally, commitments to trail partners would go unfulfilled, and many additional natural and cultural resources would not receive the partnership assistance leveraged by the trail.

The strategic plan authorized in S. 1721 would be an important tool to help the trail develop a long-term management strategy that includes creating a self-sustaining funding mechanism that does not depend indefinitely on operational funding from the National Park Service. To this end, we would recommend that the title be amended to increase the authorization ceiling by an additional \$4 million only instead of eliminating the ceiling altogether. We also would recommend an amendment to require this strategic plan to be done in partnership with the State. Also, because the reauthorization extension proposed in section 201 of S. 1721 has already passed (May 2006), we would recommend that section 6(c) of Public Law 100-515 be amended to change “12” to “15” thus extending the reauthorization date until May 2009.

### **Title III-John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor**

Title III would reauthorize the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission for an additional 20 years, authorize an additional \$10 million over 20 years to support the commission, expand the commission from 19 to 25 members, require an update of the Cultural Heritage and Land Management Plan, and authorize \$10 million over 10 years in development funds for the heritage corridor. The Department does not support Title III of S. 1721 as currently drafted, which is not in keeping with the framework of the heritage area program legislation supported by the Department.

Designated 20 years ago as only the second national heritage area in the country, the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor celebrates the “Birthplace of the American Industrial Revolution”—the Blackstone River Valley of Massachusetts and Rhode Island. The commission that has managed the corridor’s programs and projects has made exceptional strides in the preservation and protection of a myriad of resources and in interpreting the rich stories of the Industrial Revolution in our nation.

It was in the Blackstone River Valley at Pawtucket that Samuel Slater, a British immigrant, in concert with Moses Brown developed the first successful textile manufacturing mill that triggered our own industrial revolution, one that continues today. Indeed, the Blackstone River Valley itself became a major center of manufacturing in the United States during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Today, largely due to the recognition of the corridor by Congress, and the important work of the commission, the region has seen a rebirth through intelligent and adaptive reuse of previous mills and manufacturing

facilities. As residents came to fully understand the nation-changing history of their region, the stories of its people, and its untapped community and economic potential through historic preservation, pride of place and appreciation of shared heritage soon followed.

The Department would recommend that Title III, section 303 be amended to only reauthorize the commission for a five-year period, and that the update of the management plan in section 302 include a requirement that the plan identify a successor non-Federal management entity for the corridor, comprised of a board with broad regional representation. The updated plan should also provide the schedule and manner in which the transition of the management of the corridor will occur from the present federal commission to a new management entity by the end of the five-year reauthorization period. Finally, the plan should provide information on how the heritage corridor will be financially self-sufficient as its work continues beyond the five-year reauthorization period.

The Department would also recommend that a new subsection be added that requires a Special Resources Study to be completed to determine whether any areas within the corridor meet the criteria for congressional designation as a unit of the National Park System. We believe the conduct of such a study is timely and appropriate. It would permit the Secretary to make recommendations to Congress including the future role that National Park Service may play in the preservation and protection of corridor resources. And finally, the Department would recommend that section 304 be amended to strike the authorization for \$10 million in development funds in order to be consistent with the appropriations levels of other national heritage areas.

#### **Title IV-Mississippi River National Heritage Area**

Title IV would designate the Mississippi River National Heritage Area consisting of all counties and parishes that border the Mississippi River, it would designate a non-profit organization, the National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium, as the management entity, it would require the development of a management plan for the heritage area, and authorize appropriations of \$2 million a year not to exceed \$20 million overall. The Department does not support enactment of this title, and would recommend that the title be amended to authorize an updated study instead.

The Mississippi River Corridor Study Commission was established by Congress in 1990 to study and determine the feasibility of designating the river corridor as a national heritage area. The study was completed in 1995 and recommended a national heritage area designation although a number of private residents were vocally against this effort based on concerns of federal control in local issues. Because this study was completed over 10 years ago before the criteria contained in our heritage area program legislation was developed, there are several key criteria that have not been evaluated including the extent of grassroots civic engagement, a boundary map for the heritage area, environmental compliance, a business plan, and financial commitments from partners. In addition, the management entity designated in this title was not one of the three groups

evaluated in the 1995 study. Also, this title would authorize the heritage area to receive double the normal amount of appropriations for other current national heritage areas and there is no sunset provision for this funding.

The Mississippi River story is one that spans many centuries, cultures, lifeways and economies. It continues to draw people to its banks, waterways and communities. A National Park Service unit now exists in the Minnesota region of the Mississippi River, offering a knowledgeable perspective based on their experience within a small section of the river as an active partner. We recommend the Mississippi River feasibility study now in existence be updated to address current public, compliance, and management needs based on the current heritage area criteria and guidelines.

### **Conclusion**

Over the past 20 years, the process for designating national heritage areas has evolved from its early stages where Congress was establishing these on an area-by-area basis with no standardized criteria, study requirements or guidelines, to a much more uniform process that still ensures each area retains its unique characteristics, resources, themes, and partnership structure. The National Park System Advisory Board's report and the national heritage area program legislation (S. 243) that passed the Senate last year and is supported by the Department, would provide a framework that establishes a national heritage area system, and sets criteria and guidelines for studies and designations to enable all parties to do a better job of evaluating and designating the national heritage areas of the future. Reauthorizing existing heritage areas for 15 or more years without the benefit of an assessment of the accomplishments and needs for sustainability, or supporting new designations that are not based upon the completion of comprehensive feasibility studies that adequately address our criteria, does not help the national heritage area program to succeed and thrive.

According to the Advisory Board report, national heritage areas are an important direction in conservation and historic preservation and are founded on consensus-based planning, local commitments, and a network of long-term partnerships. As the individual areas approach the termination of their funding authorization, they need to plan for future options to sustain the partnerships and program beyond reauthorizing the area for an additional fifteen years of funding. Through advance planning, new partnerships can be forged that sustain the heritage area approach and honor the legislative commitment of financial support.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to comment. This concludes my prepared remarks and I will be happy to answer any questions you or other committee members might have.